

AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

FINAL REPORT

1998-2001

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**“INDEPENDENCE FOR PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES
THROUGH GOAL-DIRECTED SERVICES”**

**MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION FOR
THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING**

**MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION
FOR THE BLIND**

MASSACHUSETTS REHABILITATION COMMISSION

JANUARY, 2001

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AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE-FINAL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

In the state fiscal year 1998, three Massachusetts EOHHS agencies serving individuals with disabilities, the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (*MCDHH*), the Commission for the Blind (*MCB*), and the Rehabilitation Commission (*MRC*), joined together to define the needs of their discrete service delivery systems. All three of these agencies have seen the demand for goal directed services rise continually. This increase in demand has occurred during a time when the Commonwealth has placed a greater emphasis on deinstitutionalization and the provision of community-based services to consumers with more severe disabilities. However, for many years this expanded mandate was accompanied by little, if any, increase in state resources to meet the needs of these citizens of the Commonwealth. In FY'99, MCDHH, MCB, and MRC received increases in appropriations for the first time in a decade. Greater recognition of the needs of these three agencies was accomplished through the advocacy of diverse constituencies and the direct result of the publication of the three year budget plan entitled "Agenda for the Future". For example, after MCDHH was established in 1986, the agency never received the funding necessary for base level development of the full range of services described in its enabling legislation. In the FY'99 State budget, those needs were finally addressed.

Since the late 1980's, two of the disability agencies, MRC and MCDHH, experienced budget reductions in the face of increased service demands. For MCB, the budget has been essentially level funded with the exception of increased "Turning 22" monies for the deaf-blind population (*See Table I*). Apart from the previously mentioned "Turning 22" increases for MCB, funding levels for all agencies have not kept pace with the inflationary impact on the cost of services, let alone the demands by more people with more severe disabilities. Programs designed to serve individuals with brain injury, "Turning 22" young adults, individuals who are deaf-blind, profoundly deaf, late deafened adults, elderly blind persons, and adults with disabilities of all types trying to live independently in their communities, have emerged and grown over the past decade.

In FY'99, FY'2000 and FY'2001 the Governor and the legislature recognized the funding needs of these three agencies and provided new monies for additional services including: "Turning 22" services, independent living services and centers, services for children with blindness, assistive technology for individuals who are blind, auxiliary aids for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing, home care services for adults with disabilities, and adaptive housing services for people with disabilities of all ages. Overall the three agencies saw a combined \$21 million increase in this period with MCDHH receiving \$1.8 million additional, MCB receiving \$5.4 million additional, and MRC receiving \$13.8 million additional. The individual chapters and tables of this report specify these increases

Looking Ahead

An individual's ability to be a full and active participant in the community continues to grow more complex, requiring the mastery of a host of skills barely thought of just a few years ago. Preparing young adults, including those with disabilities, to thrive and eventually assume responsibility for the management of our society is a worthwhile and highly challenging goal. The work of the three discrete disability agencies in Massachusetts is nothing short of this important mission. People with disabilities are equal members of the next generation of citizens and community leaders. Our agencies are charged with assisting consumers to create opportunities for the attainment of the knowledge and skills and supports necessary to thrive, achieve independence and become productive and active participants in the life of the Commonwealth.

For many persons in the disability community, the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (*ADA*) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (*IDEA*) represent an unfulfilled promise. Laws requiring equal education and equal access do not automatically create equality. These three disability agencies have clearly demonstrated the expertise to assist people with disabilities to live independently, gain access to information, education and services, and if at all possible, to attain and maintain employment. The goal of this program expansion is independence, both personal and financial, for all citizens with disabilities in Massachusetts.

Public Hearings

In order to better define the service needs of the constituents of the three discrete disability agencies, a "Discussion Draft" of this document was developed in June of 1997. The draft document was shared with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and was endorsed for further consideration and review by those in the disability community who have an interest in the services and capacity of the three agencies.

A major component of this review process included conducting four public hearings held over the summer and early fall of 1997 in Boston, Worcester, Holyoke, and Fairhaven. People with disabilities and other interested stakeholders were invited to provide testimony concerning the discussion document and to identify their service issues and programmatic priorities. The three Commissioners (*Bartels, Crawford, and Wood*) were present at each of the hearings and were available to ask and answer questions when clarification was needed.

The hearings generated tremendous participation in support of the concepts outlined in the discussion draft. Attendance in every location was excellent. It should be noted that each person providing testimony frequently represented dozens of other individuals, as they spoke on behalf of a particular program, service or constituency. Attendees included persons with disabilities, their parents and other family members, personal care attendants and other providers, with the following participation:

Locations

- Mass. Archives, Boston - 150 attendees
- Assumption College, Worcester - 50 attendees
- Heritage Park, Holyoke - 50 attendees
- Nemasket Group, Fairhaven - 50 attendees

TOTAL ATTENDEES - 300

The testimony frequently echoed several themes already found in the service and program expansion proposals presented in the discussion draft document. In some cases however, revisions and/or the addition of new program items were the direct result of testimony presented at the hearings. The details and real life experiences shared by a great many participants were essential to building the descriptive material contained in this report.

In the Fall of 1998, the “Agenda for the Future” was updated to reflect the budget improvements of all three agencies for state FY’99. Additional opportunities for comment and review of the “Year Two” document were provided in late November and early December of 1998 through the input from another four public forums held throughout the state. These additional forums were useful in developing an understanding of the revisions of the “Agenda for the Future-Year Two” and in identifying emerging issues in the disability community.

Again, in the Fall of 1999, the “Agenda for the Future” was updated to include the budgetary accomplishments of the State FY’2000 budget process. This document was again presented to the Administration, the Legislature, and the public as a tool to communicate the needs of people with disabilities as determined by this multi-year consumer-driven process.

Document Description

This document has been prepared in order to identify the very specific service needs of the people with disabilities to whom these services are provided. The budget figures presented provide the FY’1999, FY’2000, and FY’2001 actual budget figures indicating the budget increases over time to meet each agency service needs.

Although many needs have been met over the past three years, there are still unmet needs of the constituents of each agency. These are described as in past years by the individual chapters covering each agency.

These numbers relating to future unmet needs do not account for unanticipated expenses which are likely to be incurred and can not be meaningfully projected, such as costs associated with additional charge-backs, lease negotiations, various rate increases, and other expenses. Estimated administrative costs are reflected in program line items. Base budget and expansion dollars are, of course, subject to the appropriations process involving the state’s Administration and Legislature.

This document is organized in three chapters, presenting the results and proposals for each agency individually, as follows; MCDHH, MCB, and MRC. The table following the Introduction section describes the funding history and an overview of funding increases of each agency (*Table I*). In each agency chapter, the description relative to every service category can be found along with spreadsheets detailing yearly budget summarizing the program's expansion items over the three year period (*Tables II, III, IV*).

Conclusion

As Commissioner's of the three agencies, MRC, MCB, and MCDHH, we present this document as a Final Report on the three year budget initiatives for the purpose of informing the Administration, including the Governor, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Administration and Finance, and the Legislature. The proposals left to be considered constitute a well thought out plan for meeting the future needs of people with disabilities in Massachusetts so they may lead more independent and productive lives. The present and proposed programs and services make effective use of limited state dollars and will, in many instances, assist even more people to become taxpayers who might otherwise remain dependent on the Commonwealth.

We thank all those who have been instrumental in expanding the services of our three agencies and look forward to discussing and addressing any further proposals with all parties involved in the state budget process.

Respectfully submitted,

Elmer C. Bartels, Commissioner
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

David Govostes, Commissioner
Massachusetts Commission for the Blind

Barbara Jean Wood, Commissioner
Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and
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